my grandpa used to braid esparto grass for hours under the shadow of the fig tree

For symphony orchestra

Composed for Georgia Tech Symphony Orchestra

Pilar Miralles

2024

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A work to reflect on the immediacy of today, to promote the doings and makings of hands, the hands as a symbol of our direct relationship with the world around us to enquire, experience, understand. A work to promote unproductivity as a means of underloading in the face of an overload of production, consumption, and optimization in our hectic everyday lives.

In this work, performers will gradually replace their playing with some kind of handcraft of their choice. Perhaps origami, drawing or writing, sewing or knitting, *braiding esparto grass*. Any craft that could be clearly optimized by a machine or through digitalization. These *doings* will be carried out slowly, calmly, and with no specific goal in mind, feeling the ease of having no expectations.

I remember my grandfather braiding esparto grass for hours with his bare hands, creating coasters, baskets, and sandals under the shadow of the fig tree behind the farmhouse.

Performance remarks

- This is a piece with no metrical organization, that is, there is no pulse or beat to be marked by the conductor. The conductor works with a stopwatch, following the time stamps provided on the full score, and cues each *event* (any change occurring in the work). Performers are provided with the durations of the events as a reference. Nonetheless, they do not need to work with a stopwatch but just rely on the conductor's cues.
- Most *events* are marked with a number. My suggestion for the performance of the piece is the following: each number could be printed or written on a big paper (there are 12 in total), and these papers could be bounded. When a number comes into play, the conductor will simply change the page, so that everyone can see the current number, and performers will react calmly to these changes. There is no need for perfect synchronicity between performers and with regard to the moment when the change occurs.

  This performance of Earle Brown's *Available Forms* is an example of what I imagine for the number marking, although there would be just one number at a time: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2cyAVRxcRI
- The only *events* that are not marked with specific numbers are the string chords between numbers 1-2, 4-5, and 7-8. Because nothing other than the strings will change during those periods, the conductor can simply cue these chords and rests for the strings with a subtle cresc. and dim. according to the time stamps. Strings players do not need to strive for a perfect synchronicity either in these changes.
- As indicated on the score, after marking the last number (12), the conductor can as well calmly start with a handcraft of their choice, perhaps sitting down on the podium. After approx. 1' 30'', everyone can slowly decrease their activity to conclude the piece. This could be perhaps intuitively measured by each performer and perfect synchronicity is not a need.
- The bar numbers are left on the score for rehearsing purposes, but there are no "bars" as such in this work. The barlines simply separate each *event.*

Instrumentation

Flutes 1, 2

Oboes 1, 2

Clarinets in B-flat 1, 2

Bassoons 1, 2

Horns in F 1, 2, 3, 4

Trumpets in B-flat 1, 2

Trombones 1, 2, 3

Tuba

(All brass players are instructed to play with a mute in – if available –. Players can choose any kind of mute that results in a mellow, damped – non-bright – color. If no mute achieves this better than playing without it, then there is no need to use a mute. Players do not have to choose the same mute, and there can be players using it and others who choose not to use any).

Timpani (I or II, tuned in G2, being C4 the central C)

Percussion (symphonic brass drum – *gran cassa* – and medium tam-tam)

(Both the timpani and bass drum players are instructed to play with their fingernails tracing circles or 8-shapes on the drum's head. If the material of the head did not produce enough sound, a brush could be used instead to imitate the soft white noise-like sound that the nails were supposed to make. There is no need for other kinds of mallets. The tam-tam is played by softly knocking on it with a knuckle).

Harp

Piano

(The piano player is instructed to play harmonics by placing their finger flesh on the strings inside the piano and pressing the corresponding key with the other hand. It would be best to prepare the piano by simply placing a small sticker on each of the four dampers corresponding to the four indicated keys, or directly on the spot of the string where the harmonic can be found, which is, depending on the piano, right above the damper or a couple of centimeters away from it. In order to access the strings, it might be necessary to remove the piano rack. It is also advisable to block the sustain pedal with a wooden or metal wedge so that the player does not need to hold it depressed while playing. The wedge can be placed before the piece starts and left throughout it).

Strings 5, 4, 3, 3, 1 (minimum)

Duration: 18' ca.

written for GTSO

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Pilar Miralles (2024)

Duration: 18' ca.

[Score in C]

Stopwatch guidance. There is no need to be exact regarding durations

0' 00" **1' 00"** **1' 30"** **1' 50"** **2' 20"** **3' 20"**

calm

1

Flute 1

Flute 2

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

Clarinet in B♭ 1

Clarinet in B♭ 2

Bassoon 1

Bassoon 2

Play random overtones from this selection (B-flat series, thumb valve). Change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed

mute in

4' 50" simile →

Horns in F 1, 2

ppp *legato*

mute in

Horns in F 3, 4

ppp *legato*

Play random overtones from this selection (B-flat series, open tube). Change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed

mute in

Trumpet in B♭ 1

ppp *legato*

mute in

Trumpet in B♭ 2

ppp *legato*

Play random overtones from this selection (B-flat series, first position). Change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed

mute in

Trombone 1

ppp *legato*

mute in

Trombones 2, 3

ppp *legato*

Play random overtones from this selection (B-flat series, open tube). Change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed

(mute in, if available)

Tuba

ppp *legato*

Timpani

Percussion
(bass drum, tam-tam)

Harp

Piano

The sustain pedal may be blocked with a wooden or metal wedge throughout the whole piece

calm

String chords will be cued with a cresc. and dim. rather than using a be-ready off-beat cue. With this I hope to obtain a different reaction time from each player instead of an accurate attack and sudden release

1

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

change bow when needed
(try not to coincide with others)
con sord.
very little to no vib.
poco sul tasto

1' **30"** **20"** simile **30"** **1'** **40"**

ppp *simile sempre* ***ppp***

4' 00" | 4' 20" | 4' 30" | 4' 50" | 5' 20" | 6' 20" | 6' 50"

7

Fl. 1
20" | 30" Gradually fade in after the oboes | 1' Play random pitches from the following selection and change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Fl. 2
20" | 30" Gradually fade in after the oboes | 1' | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Ob. 1
20" | 30" Gradually fade in after the bassoons | 1' Play random pitches from the following selection and change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Ob. 2
20" | 30" Gradually fade in after the bassoons | 1' | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Cl. 1
20" | Gradually fade in 30" | 1' Play random pitches from the following selection and change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Cl. 2
20" | Gradually fade in 30" | 1' | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Bsn. 1
20" | Gradually fade in after the clarinets 30" | 1' Play random pitches from the following selection and change the pitch at an irregular pace, but always slowly (approx. 2-5" each). Try not to coincide with other players and breathe independently when needed | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Bsn. 2
20" | Gradually fade in after the clarinets 30" | 1' | 3' 30" simile
pppp | ppp legato

Hn. 1, 2
Gradually reduce the pace at which overtones are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage (keep breathing when needed) 30" | Sustain the last chosen overtone and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed 1' | Leave the horn calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the trombone players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly HANDCRAFT

Hn. 3, 4
30" | 1' | HANDCRAFT

Tpt. 1
Gradually reduce the pace at which overtones are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage (keep breathing when needed) 30" | Sustain the last chosen overtone and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed 1' | Leave the trumpet calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly HANDCRAFT

Tpt. 2
30" | 1' | HANDCRAFT

Tbn. 1
Gradually reduce the pace at which overtones are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage (keep breathing when needed) 30" | Sustain the last chosen overtone and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed 1' | Leave the trombone calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the tuba player does. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly HANDCRAFT

Tbn. 2, 3
30" | 1' | HANDCRAFT

Tuba
Gradually reduce the pace at which overtones are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage (keep breathing when needed) 30" | Sustain the last chosen overtone and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed 1' | Leave the tuba calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the trumpet players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly HANDCRAFT

Timp.

Perc.

Hp.

Pno.

2 | 3 | 4

Vln. I
20" | 10" | 20" | 30" | 1' | 30" | 20"
ppp legato | ppp

Vln. II
20" | 10" | 20" | 30" | 1' | 30" | 20"
ppp legato | ppp

Vla.
20" | 10" | 20" | 30" | 1' | 30" | 20"
ppp legato | ppp

Vc.
20" | 10" | 20" | 30" | 1' | 30" | 20"
ppp legato | ppp

Db.
20" | 10" | 20" | 30" | 1' | 30" | 20"
ppp legato | ppp

7' 10" | 7' 40" | 8' 00" | 8' 10" | 8' 30" | 9' 10"

14

Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
Hn. 1, 2
Hn. 3, 4
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2, 3
Tuba
Timp. — 40"
Perc. — 40"
Hp.
Pno.

Vln. I — 30" | 20" | 10" | 20" | 40" | 40"
ppp | ppp legato | ppp

Vln. II — divisi / unis. — 30" | 20" | 10" | 20" | 40" | 40"
ppp | ppp legato | ppp

Vla. — 30" | 20" | 10" | 20" | 40" | 40"
ppp | ppp legato | ppp

Vc. — 30" | 20" | 10" | 20" | 40" | 40"
ppp | ppp legato | ppp

Db. — 30" | 20" | 10" | 20" | 40" | 40"
ppp | ppp legato | ppp

9' 50" | 10' 20" | 11' 20" | 11' 30" | 11' 50" | 12' 10"

20

5 Gradually reduce the pace at which pitches are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage. Keep breathing when needed

6 Sustain the last chosen pitch and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed

7 Leave the flute calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

Fl. 1 — 30" — 1' — HANDCRAFT

Fl. 2 — 30" — 1' — HANDCRAFT

Ob. 1 — Gradually reduce the pace at which pitches are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage. Keep breathing when needed — 30" — Sustain the last chosen pitch and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed. — 1' — Leave the oboe calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the flute players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly — HANDCRAFT

Ob. 2 — 30" — 1' — HANDCRAFT

Cl. 1 — Gradually reduce the pace at which pitches are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage. Keep breathing when needed — 30" — Sustain the last chosen pitch and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed. — 1' — Leave the claninet calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the bassoon players do. Do it calmly,slowly, and quietly — HANDCRAFT

Cl. 2 — 30" — 1' — HANDCRAFT

Bsn. 1 — Gradually reduce the pace at which pitches are chosen up to sustaining just one of them towards the end of the passage. Keep breathing when needed — 30" — Sustain the last chosen pitch and fade out slowly (try not to coincide with other players). Keep breathing when needed. — 1' — Leave the bassoon calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the oboe players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly — HANDCRAFT

Bsn. 2 — 30" — 1' — HANDCRAFT

Hn. 1, 2

Hn. 3, 4

Tpt. 1

Tpt. 2

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2, 3

Tuba

Timp. — Use the nails of both hands to gently scratch the head of the timpani tracing circles or 8-shapes (if the nails do not produce enough sound, a brush can be used instead to get a similar soft white noise-like sound). Play 1-3 waves of fade in and out of different durations and then leave a rest. You can also slightly change the tuning of the timpani while scratching

30" — 2' 40" simile →

pp — *mp* — *pp*

4-7" — 4-7"

Perc. — Choose among and combine these two materials at wish (there is no need to always alternate):
- On the bass drum, use the nails of both hands to gently scratch the head tracing circles or 8-shapes (if the nails do not produce enough sound, a brush can be used instead to get a similar soft white noise-like sound). Play 1-3 waves of fade in and out of different durations and then leave a rest.
- On the tam-tam, calmly knock with a knuckle 1-3 times alternating between the margin and center at wish

30" — 2' 40" simile →

bass drum (nails) — tam-tam (with a knuckle): center, margin

pp — *mp* — *pp* — *p*

4-7" — 1-3 knocks — 4-7"

Hp.

Pno.

5 **6** **7**

Vln. I — 30" — 1' — 10" — 20" — 20" — 40"

ppp legato — *ppp*

Vln. II — 30" — 1' — 10" — 20" — 20" — 40"

ppp legato — *ppp*

Vla. — 30" — 1' — 10" — 20" — 20" — 40"

ppp legato — *ppp*

Vc. — 30" — 1' — 10" — 20" — 20" — (unis.) 40"

ppp legato — *ppp*

Db. — 30" — 1' — 10" — 20" — 20" — 40"

ppp legato — *ppp*

12' 50" | 13' 00" | 15' 00" | 16' 30" | 16' 30" | 18' 00" ca.

8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12

After the last number is indicated, the conductor can also calmly start with their chosen handcraft, sitting down on the podium. After approx. 1' 30" everyone can slowly decrease their acivity to conclude the piece

26

Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Cl. 1
Cl. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
Hn. 1, 2
Hn. 3, 4
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2, 3
Tuba

Timp.

Very gradually separate the waves every time more and decrease the dynamics until the material is completely gone

2'

Leave the instrument calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Perc.

Very gradually separate the waves and knocks every time more and decrease the dynamics until the material is completely gone

2'

Leave the instrument calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Hp.

Play random pairs of pitches from the following selection and at an irregular pace, but always slowly (leave a random space of approx. 1-3" between each)

10"

2'

l.v. sempre

p

pp

1' simile →

Very gradually separate the pitches every time more and decrease the dynamics until the material is completely gone

30"

Leave the harp calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Pno.

Play random harmonics from the following selection and at an irregular pace, but always slowly (leave a random space of approx. 1-3" between each). In order to obtain these harmonics, place the finger flesh on the strings right above the damper (search for the right spot, depending on the piano it might be a couple of centimeters above the damper) of the note indicated on the lower stave, and then press its corresponding key with the other hand. The finger can be released afterwards. The note on the upper stave represents the resulting pitch

10"

2'

(resulting sound)

pp

(pressed key)

1' simile →

Very gradually separate the harmonics every time more and decrease the dynamics until the material is completely gone

30"

Sit on the stool calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Ped. sempre

As indicated at the beginning of the score, the sustain pedal may be blocked with a wedge throughout the whole piece

Vln. I

Leave the violin calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Vln. II

Leave the violin calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the cello players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Vla.

Leave the viola calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the bass players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Vc.

Leave the cello calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the violin I players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT

Db.

Leave the bass calmly and start your chosen handcraft activity after the violin II players do. Do it calmly, slowly, and quietly

HANDCRAFT